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Korean cultural characteristics and graphic design

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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
in candidacy for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

Korean Cultural Characteristics and Graphic Design

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May 2000

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Modern Korean culture is similar to Western culture in many ways. The globalization of commerce and environment and the speed of modern communications have made today's culture more universal. In fact, during their country's development, Koreans have begun to forget some of their old traditions. I appreciate this opportunity to reflect on Korean culture and relate it to my thesis study.

Jungyun Shin

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Introduction

Culture is defined as an integrated system of learned behavior patterns that distinguishes the members of social groups. Culture includes the beliefs, value systems, norms, mores, myths, and structural elements of a society. Because some countries might share a similar style of culture, culture is something that we can have in common. However, even among similarities, there may exist differences. These cultural differences, forms, or styles, are cultural characteristics.

Graphic Design is the visual communication of ideas, messages, information, and concepts; the process of bringing meaningful visual form to communication. It combines conceptual thinking and an aesthetic use of the elements and principles of art with type, symbols, and imagery to form visual statements that are striking, unique, original, and accessible. Graphic design aims to create visual interest for the viewer in order to be successful in its purpose. Graphic designers translate communication goals through printed, environmental, and electronic presentations of information.

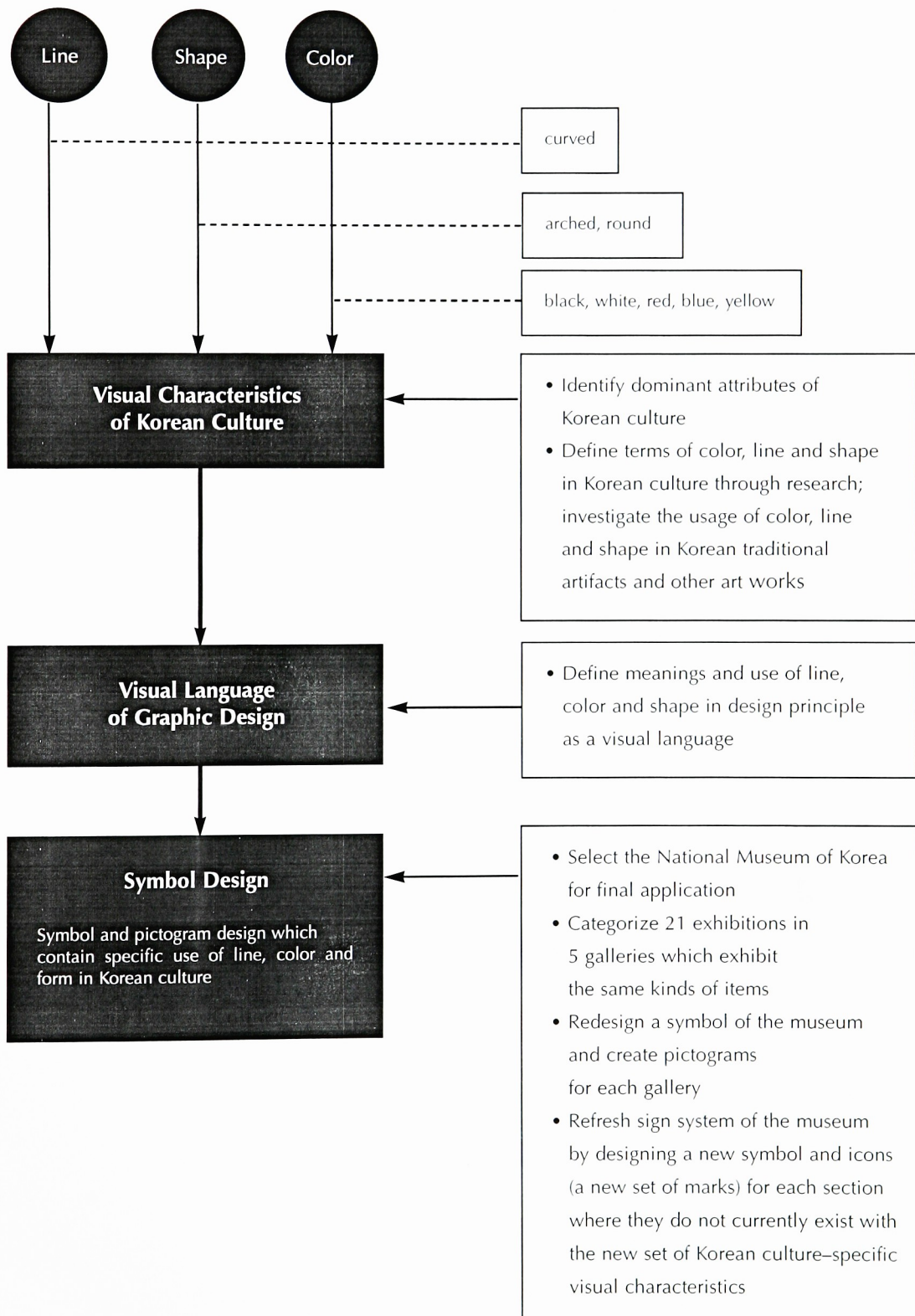
How can cultural characteristics be reflected in graphic design work? Taking traditional Korean culture as its main focus, this thesis project examines the use of line, shape, and color in Korean cultural artifacts. Moreover, the dominant characteristics of line, shape, and color present in Korean culture, will be used to develop a graphic design solution that will reflect these Korean cultural characteristics.

Thesis Problem Definition

Different cultures are fascinating because they have their own special characteristics and unique ways of setting themselves apart from the cultures of other countries. The outpouring of emotions and feelings of the people into their cultural and natural environments is a significant reason to look at the form culture takes. This thesis project proposes to explore the connection between cultural background and graphic design; in other words, how characteristics of culture can be applied to graphic design. Cultural characteristics of the Korean tradition will be used for this study.

Every object consists of various visual elements such as line, shape, texture, point, size and color. These elements, which are the basis of design, are very important as a visual language. For Koreans, the use of lines, shapes, and colors in things around them such as artifacts and other cultural art works are a distinguishing characteristic of their art and culture. **(See Appendix A)** In this project, culturally specific kinds of lines, shapes and colors in Korean culture will be explored and incorporated to create a visual language in graphic design.

The final goal for this thesis project is to discover distinctive cultural qualities and apply these characteristics to graphic design problem-solving. Therefore, this project will demonstrate how cultural characteristics and graphic design can be combined to form a visual language that communicates effectively.



Research

Visual Communication Exercise; Road Sign Problem-Solving

Exercise

Immediate, practical communication is the primary function of the road sign. With this in mind, graphically depict the subject indicated for each of the twelve road signs on the assignment sheet. Execute each solution as a finished piece in black; if the concept dictates, use of an additional color is permissible. On the back of the assignment sheet, create your own road sign depicting another subject and title it accordingly.

Visual Literacy / A Conceptual Approach to Graphic Design Problem Solving

by Judith and Richard Wilde

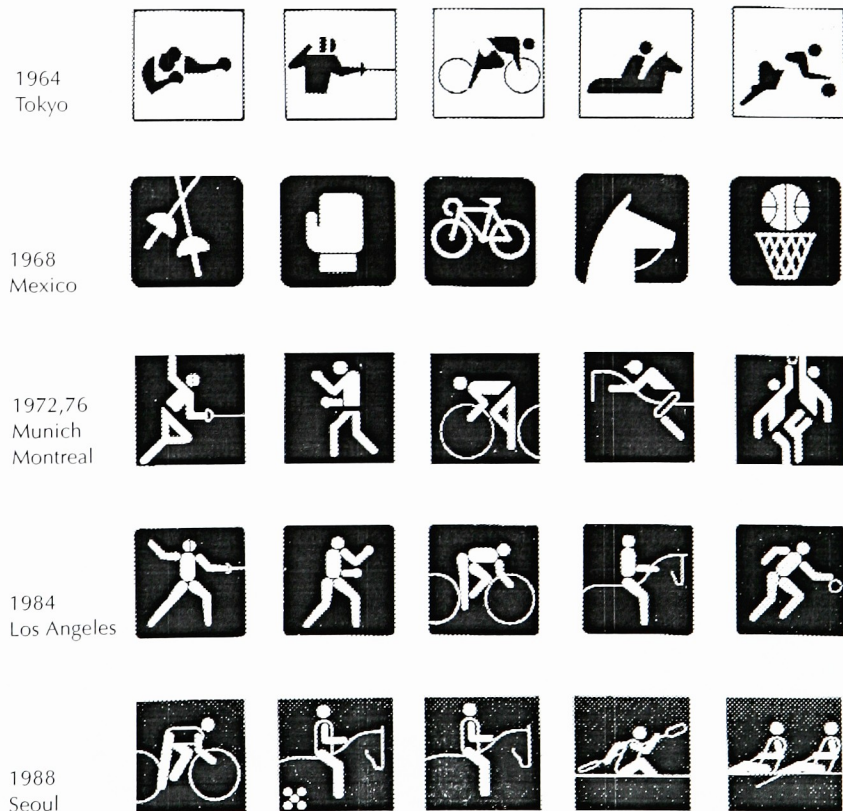
The following road sign problem-solving exercise is a meaningful precedent for this study because signs must communicate with people as a visual language. This exercise also encourages creative thinking about a subject to communicate with people. To complete one set of road signs, multiple ideas for each subject are implemented. Thus, it helps to think of various design solutions for one subject, and it helps to be creative in problem-solving. The sample results show creativity in both approach and design by suggesting unusual topics and their solution. (See Appendix B)

Example 1: Indian Village



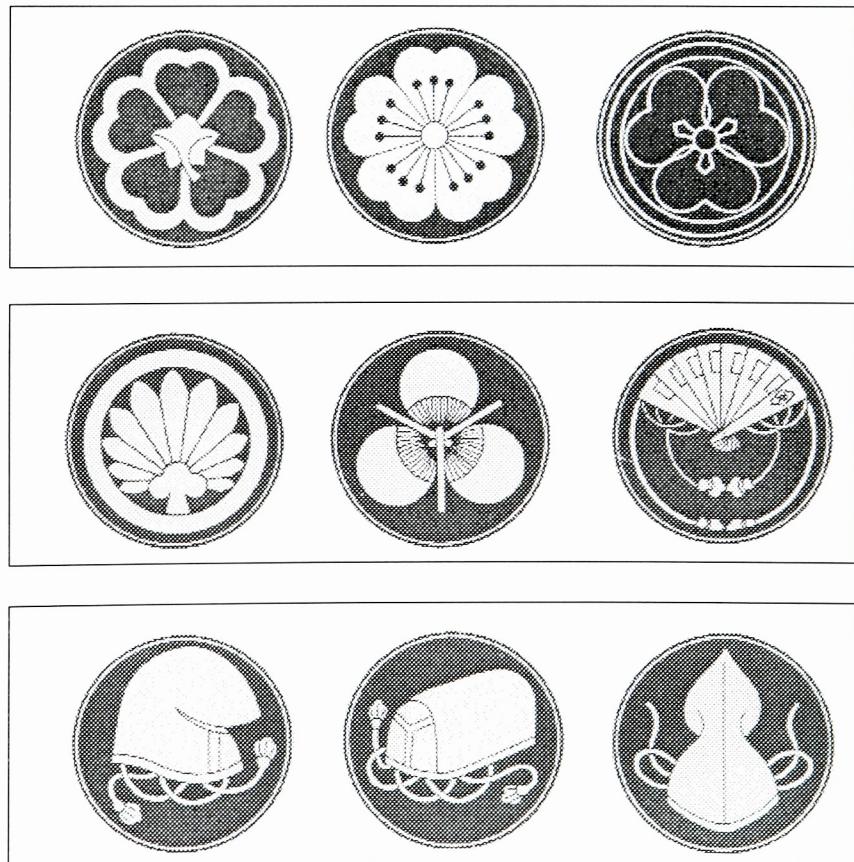
Pictograms for Olympic Games

Pictograms are a powerful visual tool because they deliver a meaning to an audience without verbal expression. These pictograms of the Olympic Games are a meaningful precedent for this study because they provide concepts of important design solutions such as systematic thinking and the unity and integration of a set of marks. A requisite of pictogram design is the establishment of certain rules to be involved in these sets of pictograms. Repetition of individual elements within a set of pictograms or the use of a common line thickness identifies them as members of a group. Therefore, it is helpful to think of the rules that govern the design of pictograms.



Japanese Symbol Design for Crests

These examples of Japanese symbol design are another meaningful precedent for this study because specific cultural elements are reflected in the design. The subject matter of these symbols involve Japanese tradition; the flowers are simplified forms of cherry blossoms, a common symbol of Japan. The subjects of these symbols are a range of objects common to daily life in Japan. Subjects in the second row are a canopy, and the third row are an umbrella and fans; all incorporate traditional Japanese motifs. Examples at the bottom right show traditional Japanese hats. They symbolize the feeling of Japan, while exhibiting cultural characteristics.



Korea has a history of about 5,000 years. Traditional Korean culture is based on Buddhism. Many cultural artifacts are related to its religion, for instance, the architecture of temples and the vivid colors used in their interior decoration. Simplicity is another cultural value seen in traditional artifacts such as clothing, which is often simple in design and of one color, white. Korean traditions have also been influenced by the culture of its neighbor, China; in fact, some Korean artifacts look like Chinese creations. Korean culture, however, is unique as is its language. Even though the two cultures may seem quite similar, each culture has its own values. Another characteristic of Korean artifacts is the use of forms that resemble nature, for example, the smooth curve of the mountains. The earth, the sky, and the people who inhabit the land are key figures in traditional stories, as well as in the national flag. The effort to adapt to their surroundings has always been a key characteristic.

Visual Language

Design creation requires a specific visual language involving principles, concepts and rules. The designer who understands visual organization will be sensitive to visual relationships and, therefore, more competent. However, there are no obvious laws to follow or grammatical rules such as in one's spoken or written language.

Principles of Form and Design by Wucius Wong

Visual language is a powerful medium to deliver a message to an audience because it has an ability to express or explain a meaning without any verbal explanation. Visual language is significant in the way human beings communicate. For example, pictograms in an airport are a very effective method of communicating information concerning locations in the airport to passengers. In fact, in many areas are commonly used to convey crucial information quickly and easily.

Elements of Design

The elements of design can be grouped into four closely related categories:

a. Conceptual elements

b. Visual elements

c. Relational elements

d. Practical elements

Although they seem quite abstract; when taken together these elements define the final content and look of a design.

Principles of Form and Design by Wucius Wong

Group of Design Elements	Conceptual Elements	Visual Elements	Relational Elements	Practical Elements
Related Design Elements	Point Line Plane Volume	Shape Size Color Texture	Direction Position Space Gravity	Representation Meaning Function

Conceptual Elements, although they seem invisible, are highly abstract. They include point, line, plane and volume. A point simply denotes position; it has neither length nor width and takes up almost no space. A line is created by movement of a point. Like the point, it has no width but, because of its length, it has both a position and a direction. Confined by points, it forms the edge of a plane. The path of a line in motion becomes a plane with width, length, position and direction, but no thickness. It defines the external boundary of a volume. The path of a plane in motion becomes a volume, which, while holding a position in space, is imaginary in two-dimensional design. When these conceptual elements become visible, they have shape, size, color and texture, the components of visual elements.

Visual Elements can be seen. Thus, they are the most prominent aspect of a design. Shape is defined as anything that we can see which provides the main identification in our perception. Size is related to shape because all shapes have a specific size and are involved with bigness and smallness, and are physically measurable. Color plays a significant role in making shape distinctive from its surroundings. It has variations in hue and chroma. Texture refers to the surface characteristics of shape. They may be decorative or flattened, smooth or rough.

Relational Elements are involved with placement and interrelationship of shapes and include direction, position, space and gravity. The direction of a shape depends on how it is related to the observer, to the frame that contains it or to other shapes nearby. The position of a shape is judged by its relationship to the frame or the structure of the design.

Practical Elements underlie the content and extension of a design. Representation, meaning and function are served by practical elements. Shapes may be realistic, stylized, or semi-abstract. Meaning is present when the design conveys a message. Function is present when a design is to serve a purpose.

Principles of Form and Design by Wucius Wong

Of the design elements described above, line, shape, and color have been singled out as significant characteristics of Korean art and artifacts.

Line

Line is defined as the path traced by a moving point or a series of points, with a beginning and an end, or two end points. A conceptual line has length but no breadth. Line as form has both length and breadth. Line also forms the border of a plane.

Principles of Form and Design by Wucius Wong

Korean Tradition

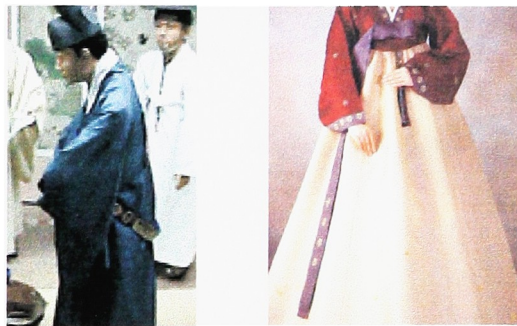
Traditional Korean architecture and craft work combine straight lines and curved lines. One of the secrets of the beauty of Korean art and artifacts is the harmony that exists between these two types of line. However, in Korean artwork curved lines are more often used than straight lines. In architecture, for example, we rarely find straight roof lines. Straw-thatched houses and tile-roofed houses are traditional styles of Korean architecture. Though different looking, they both favor curved lines. Another example is the use of curved lines in clothing. Very smooth lines in sleeves, women's skirts and men's pants are common. Women's skirts feature a basic "A-shaped line", which appears as curved. In crafts, although the use of line is determined by function, curved lines are dominant. If a piece of woodwork involves squares or rectangles, curved lines will be used in the decorative elements.



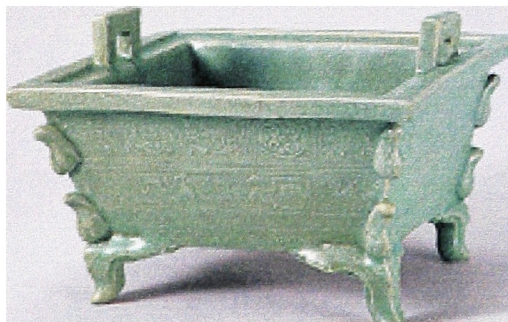
A tile-roofed architecture



A straw-thatched house



Men and women's clothing



Rectangular vessel with curved decoration

Curved lines are visually compatible with the Korean landscape, which features many mountains whose shapes are smoothly curved. In rural districts, we see harmony between houses and the surrounding mountains. While a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, a curved line is not. A curved line more strongly reflects a respect for nature, a traditional Korean cultural value.



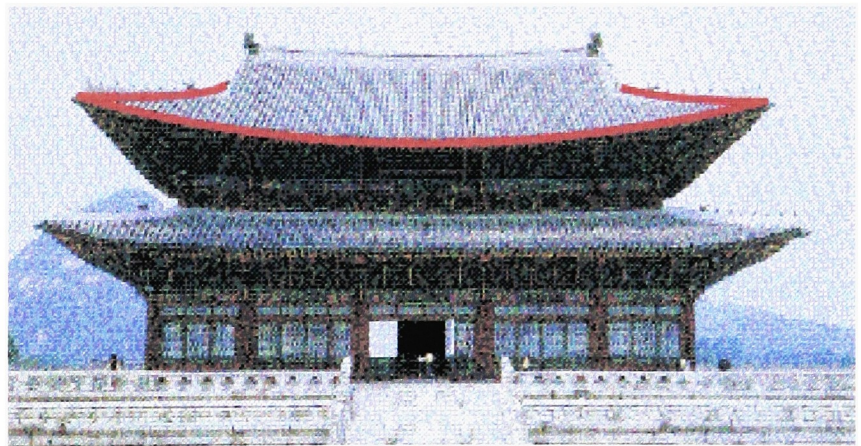
A tile-roofed house
in a natural setting



A straw-thatched house
in a natural setting

The curved line is a valuable attribute of traditional Korean art. These examples show the use of different kinds of curved lines in traditional Korean artifacts. To determine how many kinds of curved lines are used in the artifacts is not easy; however, we can broadly identify them by highlighting the images of the artifacts. Gently curved lines, more sharply curved lines, and geometrically curved lines are shown in the four categories; architecture, fashion, crafts and tools.

Architecture



Temple



Royal palace



Temple

Fashion



Women's jacket

Tool



Women's shoes



Fan

Craft



Ceramic



Ceramic

What is Shape?

Shape is defined as the characteristics of a line or a plane, or the appearance of a form from a particular angle and distance. A planar shape is normally defined by an outline which can be filled with color, pattern, or texture.

Shape is the most important of the visual elements. The words shape and form are used almost synonymously; but shape excludes all references to size, color, and texture, while form encompasses all such elements.

Principles of Form and Design by Wucius Wong

Korean Tradition

The harmonious use of color, line and shape inform what is so beautiful in traditional Korean culture. Like line, shape is also related to nature. The round, arched shapes found in architecture and craft work imitate those found in the Korean landscape and reflect the desire for harmony with nature. The smooth, rounded shape which suggests never-ending cycle, reflects the concept of constant mutation, an important tenet of Buddhism, long the major religion.



Arched shaped tombs
in a natural setting



Arched shaped temple gate



Round shaped temple pagoda

The use of round, arched shapes is a notable characteristic in Korean culture. Round shapes include circles and ovals. These examples show the use of shape in Korean artifacts in four sections: architecture, crafts, tools and fashion.

Architecture

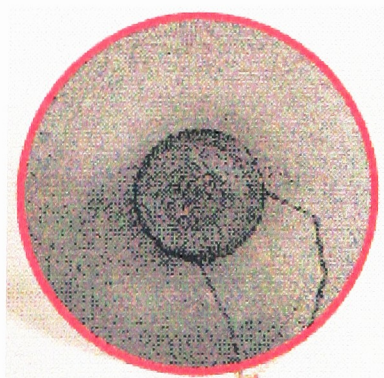


Temple pagoda



Temple gate

Fashion



Men's hat

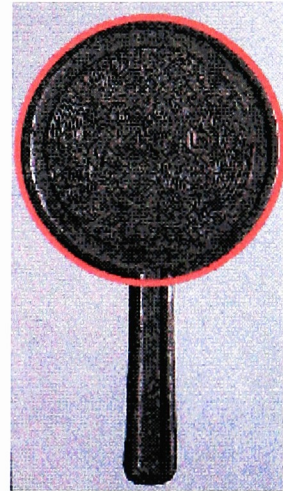


Women's accessory

Craft

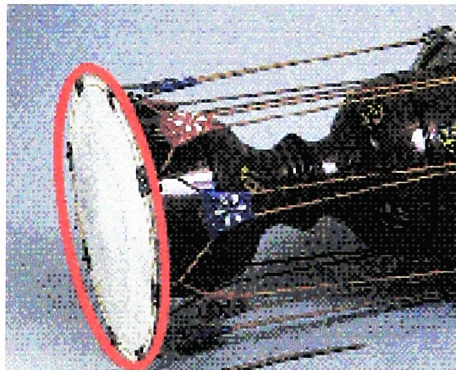


Ceramic incense burner

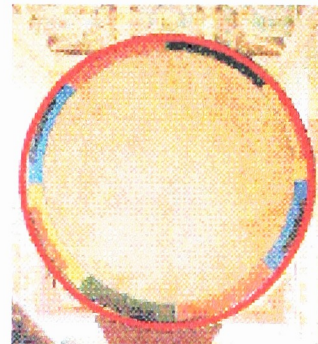


Mirror

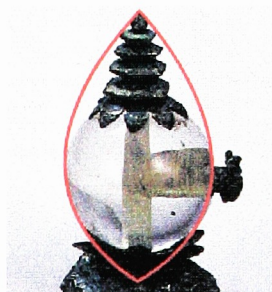
Tool



Musical instrument



Musical instrument



Lamp

What is Color?

Color has become so much a part of our lives, our culture, and even our language that we tend to take it for granted. The foundation for color symbolism has been built upon many centuries of history, religion, tradition and superstition. Practically every race and culture has used color symbolically, assigning a variety of qualities and even specific objects to certain colors. The reason is probably that the sensation of color is a primitive one. Reaction to it or recognition of it, requires little effort of intellect or imagination. Color conveys moods that affix themselves quite automatically to human feeling.

If light is the only source of color, how does nature get its broad spectrum of color? Color exists only in light, which seems almost colorless to the human eye. The lightest colors in nature only reflect, absorb and transmit one or more of the colors that constitute light. Without light, even the faintest colors do not exist. Light reflected from an object can, however, also be accurately measured by scientific instruments and numerically described. Thus, all visible colors can be defined and matched.

Color Theory / Color Perception by Laura Funderburk

Traditional Color in Korea

How is the Korean concept of beauty evident? It appears prominently in the use of color, line and shape in traditional Korean culture. If we understand this, we can discover the beauty of Korean tradition.

Centuries ago, the name of colors in the Korean language were derived from elements of nature; for example, the word meaning “blue” was also the word for “sky”. Modern Korea, however, has borrowed the name of the colors from the color spectrum (red, blue, green, etc). Traditional Korean use of color is related to nature. Korea has four distinctive seasons, and every season creates a different-looking nature. Due to the characteristics of Korean nature, Koreans tend to prefer colors found in nature. The color preference of the populace is white but people like primary colors such as red, blue, and yellow, also. We can see the use of white color in common clothing, while the use of primary colors appears in traditional architecture and traditional dress. This characteristic of Korean color use appears in the traditional Korean house. For instance, a thatched house or a gray-toned tile-roofed house shows an intention to adapt to nature. Thus, the colors preferred by Korean artisans tend to correspond to the colors found in their natural environment.

In traditional art, five colors were dominant: black, red, blue, yellow and white. These five colors prominent in Korean culture can be seen in architecture, clothing, crafts and other artifacts. The sources of these five colors are from the plant kingdom. Thus they are colors found in nature which have a strong power of expression. These five colors indicate the five directions: north, south, east, west, and center. For example, in ancient wars, black flags led soldiers to the north, blue flags led them to the east, red flags to the south, white flags to the west, and yellow flags led soldiers to the center. These colors are also expressions of the seasons. These traditional Korean colors are related to the five natural elements that support human life: earth, fire, wood, water and metal. (See pages 21 to 25)

Red

General Symbolic Use

Red is the primary color at the lower end of the visible spectrum.

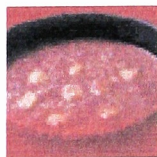
The name refers to tones ranging from very bright, bold red, to reddish yellow or reddish brown. Found both in the tales of ancient medicine and in modern superstitions, red has been seen as the vigorous color of health. In olden times red wool was used to relieve sprains in Scotland and sore throats in Ireland, and to prevent fevers in Macedonia. The ruby, a precious gemstone with a brilliant red color, was worn in China to promote long life.

Color Theory / Color Perception by Laura Funderburk

Korean Tradition

Red indicates the direction south; it also represents summer. Of the traditional Korean colors related to the five natural elements that support human life, red symbolizes fire. In ancient times, this color was used for the formal dress of the royal family. It conveys feelings of health, heaviness, extroversion, activity, passion, progress and vitality.

Examples of red from natural source



Food made with
red beans



Flower



Flower



Fruits

Yellow

General Symbolic Use

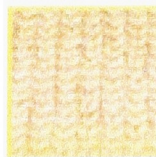
The bright golden color yellow lies between green and orange in the visible spectrum. Along with red and blue, it is one of the primary colors. In heraldry, where it is called *or* (for gold) the color yellow represents the positive virtues of faith, constancy, wisdom, and glory. It also has been considered to represent playfulness, light, creativity, warmth and an easy-going attitude toward life. The color yellow also has negative associations such as jealousy, treachery, cowardice, aging, and illness.

Color Theory / Color Perception by Laura Funderburk

Korean Tradition

Yellow indicates the center. It symbolizes the earth among the five natural elements that support human life. In ancient times, this color was used in the formal dress of the king; in fact, yellow clothing was prohibited for commoners. It conveys feelings of freshness, hope, brilliance, cheerfulness, softness, warmth, pleasure, kindness, tenderness and sweetness.

Examples of yellow from natural source



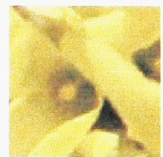
Straw



Food



Berry
(yellow juice)



Flower

Blue

General Symbolic Use

Traditionally blue is the color of constancy and faith. Painters chose blue for the Virgin Mary's robe because it was the color of the heavens and the oceans. The soothing color blue stands for sensitivity, peace, loyalty and the desire to nurture. In the symbolism of heraldry, blue is called azure and signifies piety and sincerity. Around the twentieth century it became a symbolic representation of the male gender, pink being the color representative of the female gender. Young children are usually dressed in these two colors to distinguish the "boys" from the "girls".

Color Theory / Color Perception by Laura Funderburk

Korean Tradition

Blue indicates the direction east; it also represents spring. Blue symbolizes wood among the five natural elements that support human life. In ancient times, this color was used in the formal dress of women, especially in the royal palace. Around the 16th century, blue was respected as a color of clothing because it reflected Korea's geographical location in the Eastern hemisphere. It conveys feelings of comfort, cold, safety, mediation, eternity, honesty, sincerity, seas, the sky, cleanliness, freshness, youth and purity.

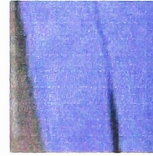
Examples of blue from natural source



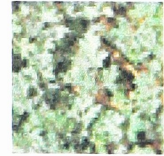
Ceramic
(natural color;
iron, soil and
glaze make
natural blue)



Jade



Fabric
(natural dye)



Plant

Black

General Symbolic Use

The color black absorbs all light, without reflecting any of its rays. Even before the physics of light was understood, however, the word black was commonly used. In many languages and cultures, black was associated with evil (and white with good). Both in art and in religion black signified despair, sin and mourning. The concept of mourning probably comes from the ancient Semitic custom of blackening the face with dirt or ashes to make it unrecognizable to the malignant dead; it was also a sign of grief and submission. At a modern funeral, the wearing of black garments to mourn the loss of a family member, relative, or close friend persists. Despite the color's negative associations, the black of heraldry, called *sable*, also stands for the virtues of constancy, prudence and wisdom.

Color Theory / Color Perception by Laura Funderburk

Korean Tradition

Black indicates the direction north; it also represents winter. Black symbolizes water of the five natural elements that support human life. In ancient times, this color was used for women's clothing and official government uniforms. It conveys feelings of darkness, heaviness, modernity, death, fear, authority, power, vanity, hopelessness, silence, uneasiness, and mystery.

Examples of black from natural source



Men's hat
(natural dye)



Food



Charcoal



Ink stick
(pine resin)

White

General Symbolic Use

White is literally the absence of all color. It is the "color" produced by reflecting all light found in the visible spectrum. Thus white clothing is considered cooler than other colors on a hot summer day since it reflects sunlight (and heat) rather than absorbing it, as black does. White has long symbolized purity, goodness, light and innocence. In heraldry white is also called *argent*, from the Latin *argentum*, for silver. The color white projects feelings of calmness, relaxation and an inner peace with one's surroundings.

Color Theory / Color Perception by Laura Funderburk

Korean Tradition

White indicates the direction south; it also represents the fall season. Of the five natural elements that support human life white symbolizes metal. This color was commonly used for ordinary people's garments. In the 16th century, however, white clothing was prohibited because blue better represented the country's geographical position. It conveys feelings of cleanliness, naturalness, purity, independence, honesty, simplicity, freshness, hope and sublimity. (See Appendix C)

Examples of white from natural source

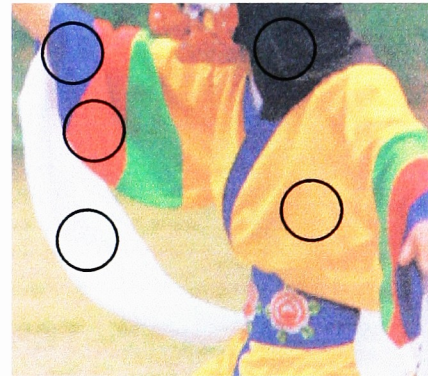


The traditional Korean colors black, white, red, blue and yellow dominate Korean artifacts. Green was often used with the five colors but it was not included among the traditional colors because traditional Korean colors are based on the theory of the cosmic dual forces (yin and yang) and the five life elements (earth, fire, wood, metal, water) of ancient Chinese philosophy. The primary colors red, blue, and yellow are primary colors have powerful visual impact. The following examples show the use of the five colors of Korean tradition. The images consist of three categories; fashion, crafts, and tools.

Fashion



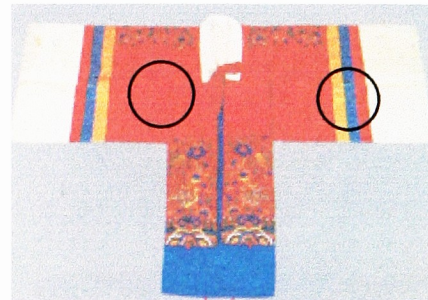
Women's formal dress
red, blue



Dress for traditional Korean dance
yellow, white, blue, red, black

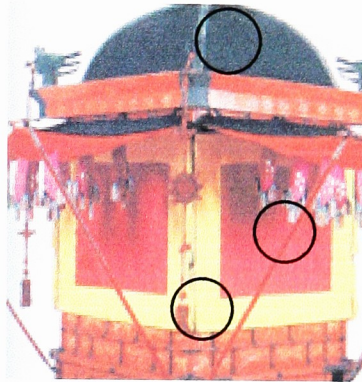


Women's accessory
red, blue, white, black,

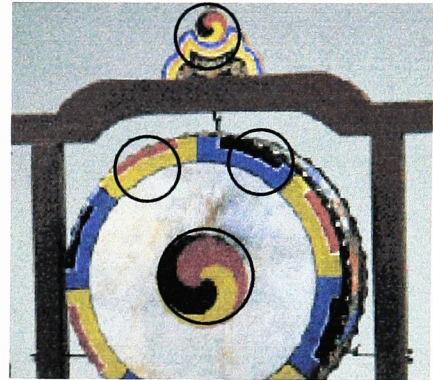


Women's formal dress
red, white, blue, yellow

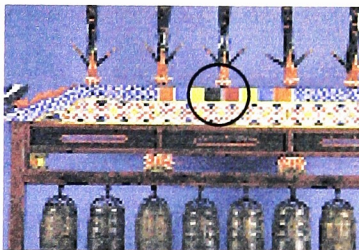
Tools



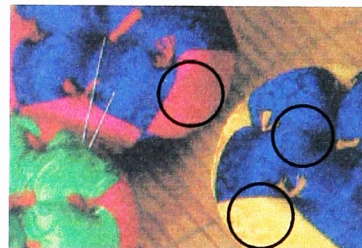
Women's transportation
red, black, yellow



Musical instrument
white, black, red, blue, yellow



Musical instrument
white, black, red, blue, yellow

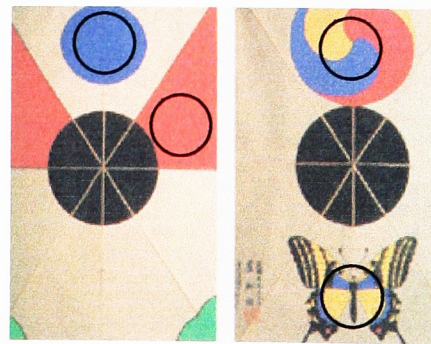


Sewing tool
blue, red, yellow

Craft



Box
yellow, red, black



Kites
red, blue, black, yellow

Synthesis

The following categories are based on visual examples showing the predominant use of line, shape, and color in the samples of traditional Korean culture that have been collected during the research process.

a. Use of Line

1 Gently curved lines

- mainly appear in the roofs of traditional Korean houses, women's dress, and shoes

2 Sharply curved lines

- mainly appear in decorated roofs of traditional Korean houses, some kinds of tools and instruments, and paintings of trees

3 Geometrically curved lines

- mainly appear in craft work

examples are shown on pages 13 and 14.

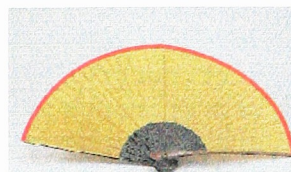
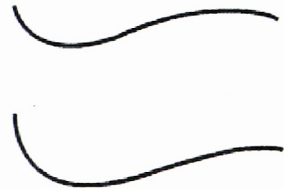
1



2



3



b. Use of Shape

1 Circles

- mainly used in handicraft work

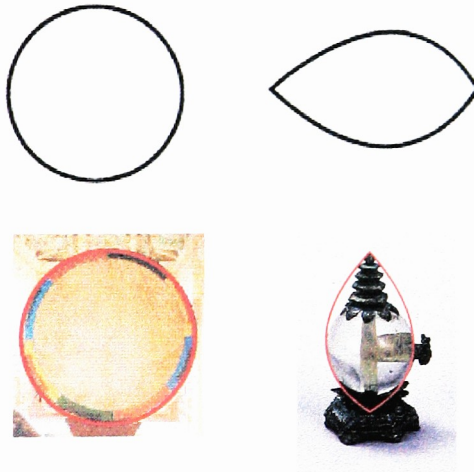
2 Ovals

- not used as much as circles,
normally appear in fashion accessories made of fabric

3 Arched shape

- mainly appear in architectural detail,
such as gates or building interiors

examples are shown on pages 17 and 18.



c. Use of Color

Traditional Korean colors are visually identified based on CMYK colors which are used in process printing.

1 Red	C 0	M 100	Y 100	K 10
2 Blue	C 100	M 60	Y 0	K 0
3 Yellow	C 0	M 20	Y 100	K 0
4 Black	C 0	M 0	Y 0	K 100
5 White	C 0	M 0	Y 0	K 0

Ideation

A new system of symbols which represent visual characteristics of Korean culture are designed in this thesis study to show the influence that cultural characteristics could have on graphic design decision making. An overall visual identity symbol as well as five specific pictograms are applied to the corporate identity program for the National Museum of Korea.

The National Museum of Korea currently has a total of 21 galleries. This museum has a main symbol for the museum; however, pictograms for each gallery do not exist. Each gallery is identified by signage, the only method of communicating its function to the visitors. The 21 galleries are divided into very specific purposes which are broadly categorized into five themes for this study: architecture, craft, fine arts, history and religion. (See **Appendix D**)

A symbol for the museum will be redesigned based on the existing royal crown symbol, and pictograms for the five galleries will be designed for permanent use in the museum. In addition, the needs of special exhibitions which change their display items must also be addressed. Pictograms for these special exhibitions are altered slightly by changing some of the elements used in the pictograms for the other five galleries.

The function of the National Museum of Korea is to collect, house and preserve national cultural treasures and arts in a comprehensive manner. This museum is an appropriate model for this project because the design elements of symbol and pictograms are derived from characteristics of traditional Korean culture. The pictograms would thus be most effectively displayed in a site like this, a museum which of its very nature is closely related to the culture.

Concept of the Main Symbol

Images of a traditional Korean door and its decorative elements are selected to visually communicate as a main symbol for the museum. The door shape suggests that people should open the door and look inside to appreciate the many things that may exist beyond it. In addition, it implies the feeling of being welcomed. The circular shape represents the constant mutation that is the foundation of Korean philosophical thoughts.

Concept of Pictograms

The selected images comprising each pictogram symbolize the contents of each gallery. The following images function to communicate with the visitor in a visual language. The main goal of the design is to avoid complicated design solutions. Simplified forms communicate to people more immediately.

Place	Selected Imagery
Museum	A door, decorations of door of Korean traditional house
Architecture	A simplified Korean house / traditional shape of Korean constructions
Craft	A vase / universal shape for ceramic art
Fine Arts	Plants / common subject matter in still life painting
History	Elements of Korean flag, book / emblem of Korea
Religion	A lotus flower, monk's gong / main symbol for Buddhism

Two approaches were explored while designing the main symbol and the pictograms. Curved lines, circles and arched shapes, and the traditional five colors described on pages 28 to 29 are used as components for both the main symbol of the National Museum of Korea and the pictograms for its division galleries.

Approach I

This approach shows the combined use of lines, shapes, and colors in the symbol and the pictograms. The following sketches show how this approach is applied to the design. All cultural characteristics are used: colors, curved lines, straight lines and circles.

Description of Symbol Sketches

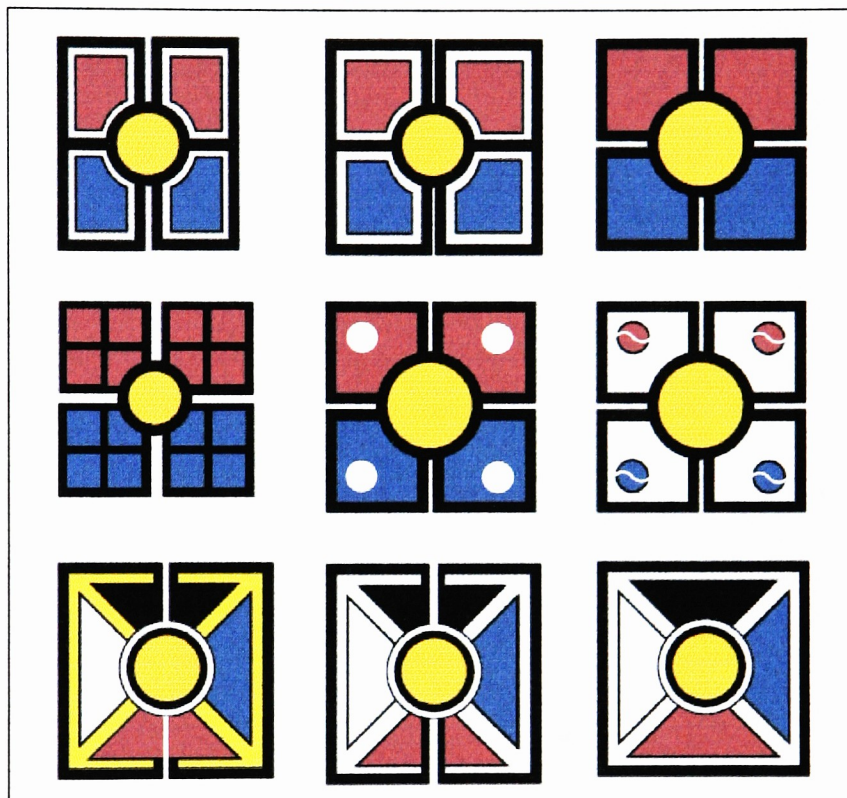
The main symbol was sketched based on the existing symbol which is a square shape, thus straight lines are dominant. A circular shape is used in the center of all sketches. These nine sketches feature traditional Korean door shape. The color approach for rows 1 and 2 follows the color of the yin and yang symbol in the Korean flag; red for the top and blue for the bottom. In the third row, the five colors indicating directions are used: black for north, south for red, east for blue, west for white and center for yellow.

Description of Pictograms

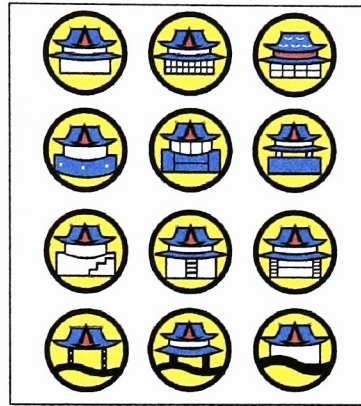
Each pictogram sketch contains a circular shape as the main component which is placed in the center of the main symbol sketches. Most of them use all five colors while curved lines are dominant. The images which are explained as subject matter on page 35 are based on these sketches. Other images such as cloud, brush and paper are used as additional components.

Sketches are shown on pages 33 to 35.

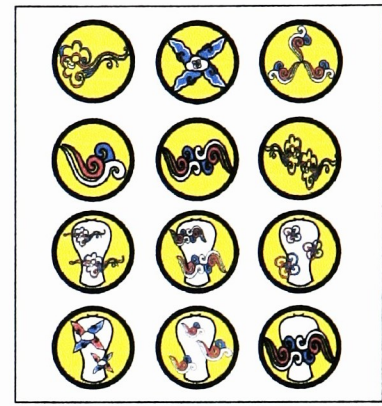
Sketches for Symbol and Pictograms



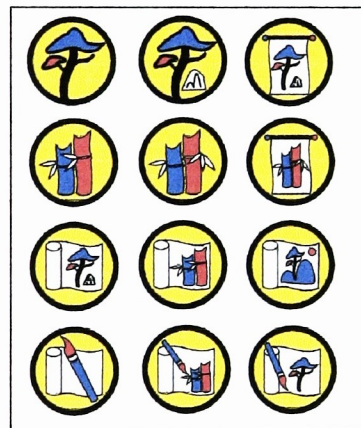
Main Symbols for the Museum



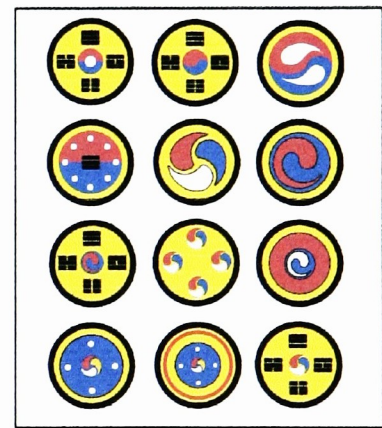
Pictograms for Architecture Gallery



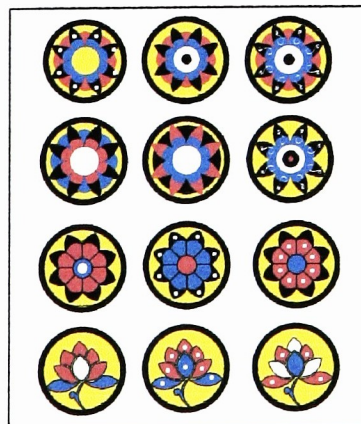
Pictograms for Craft Gallery



Pictograms for Fine Arts Gallery



Pictograms for History Gallery



Pictograms for Religion Gallery

Sketches for Pictogram Systems



Architecture

Craft

Fine Arts

History

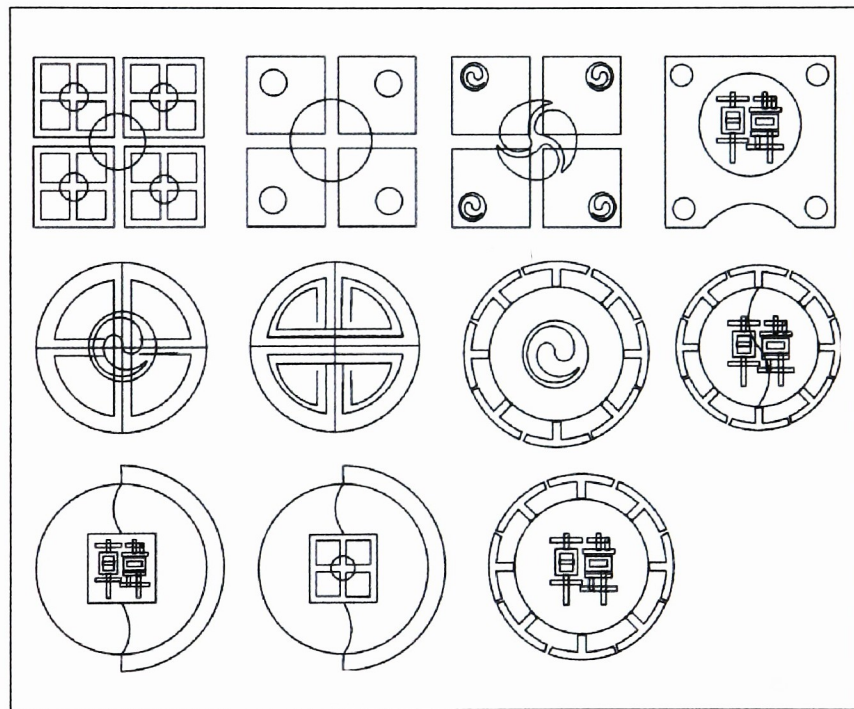
Religion

Special

Approach II

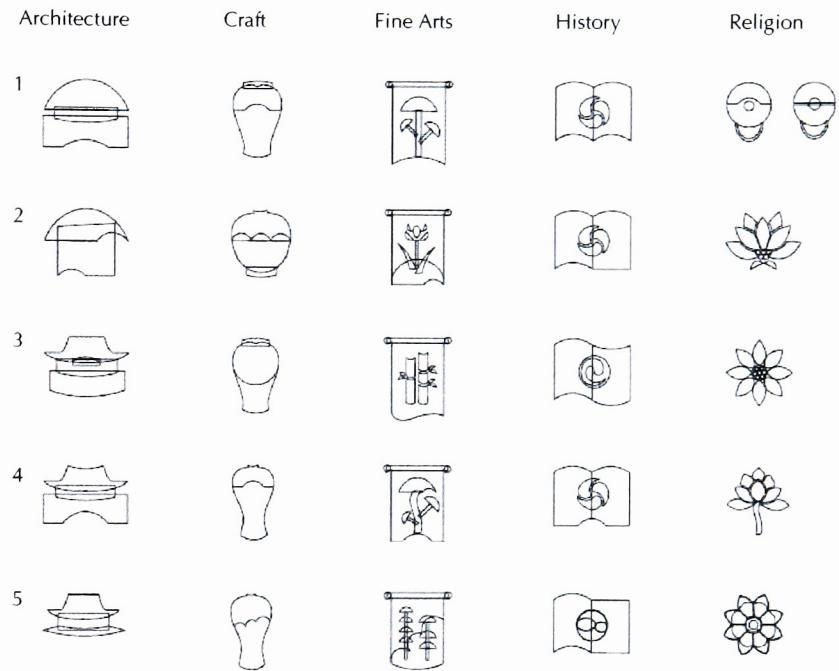
This approach shows the use of lines, shapes, and colors step by step. First, lines and shapes are used in the design, then colors are applied to the line and shape to complete the symbol and the pictograms. The components of each design are easily seen because this approach shows individual components in a sequence.

Sketches for the Main Symbol



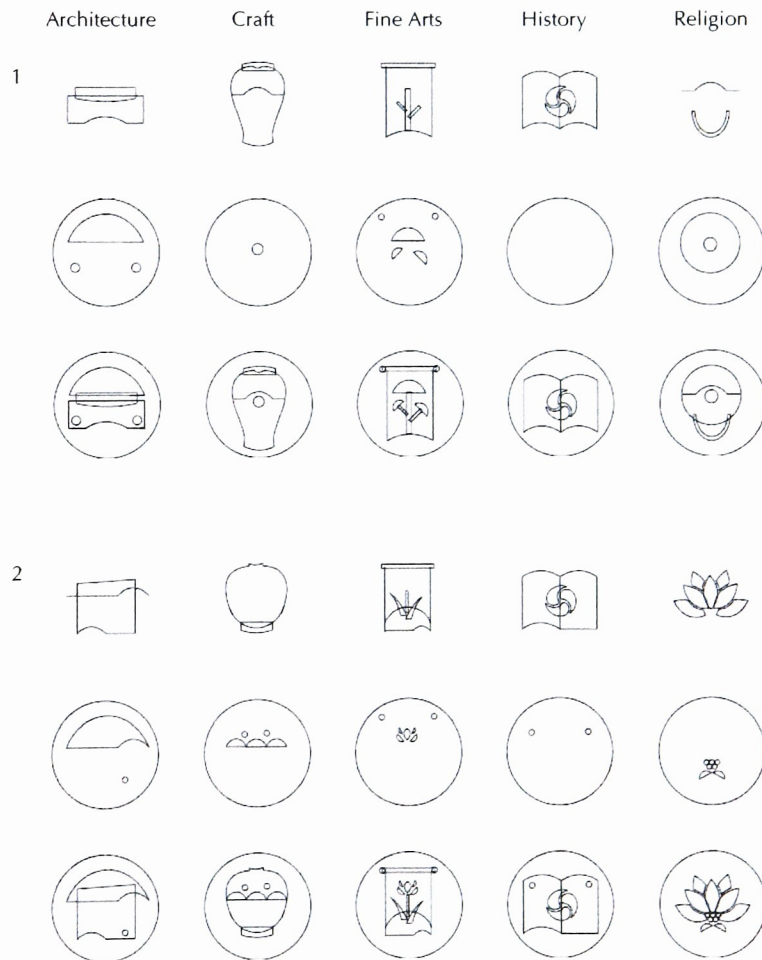
The first row of sketches shows the traditional shape of a Korean door which combines curved lines and straight lines. The sketches in rows 2 and 3 are based on the common decorative elements of the door. Circles and curved lines are the main components of these eleven sketches. Modified shapes of yin and yang are used. The Chinese character for the word “Korea” is used because such characters still appear occasionally; they connote respect for the past. Although the first row and the sketches in the bottom two rows have different approaches, a circle is placed in the center of the most of these symbols. This circle is subsequently used as a major component of the pictograms.

Sketches for Pictograms for Galleries



Two different styles of traditional Korean houses; a tile-roofed house and a straw-thatched house are shown in their simplified form. Three different kinds of common vase forms are used to indicate the craft section. A combination of a pine tree, a bamboo, an orchid and a wall hanging scroll symbolize the fine arts section. A book and three kinds of yin and yang forms identify the history gallery. A monk's gong and a lotus flower refer to the religion gallery.

The first row of these sketches shows the use of only lines, the second row shows the use of only shape, and the last row shows the complete design of the pictograms by combining lines and shapes. This process is used to identify the use of line and shape that have been discussed in the research section. Straight lines are used as secondary elements in these sketches.

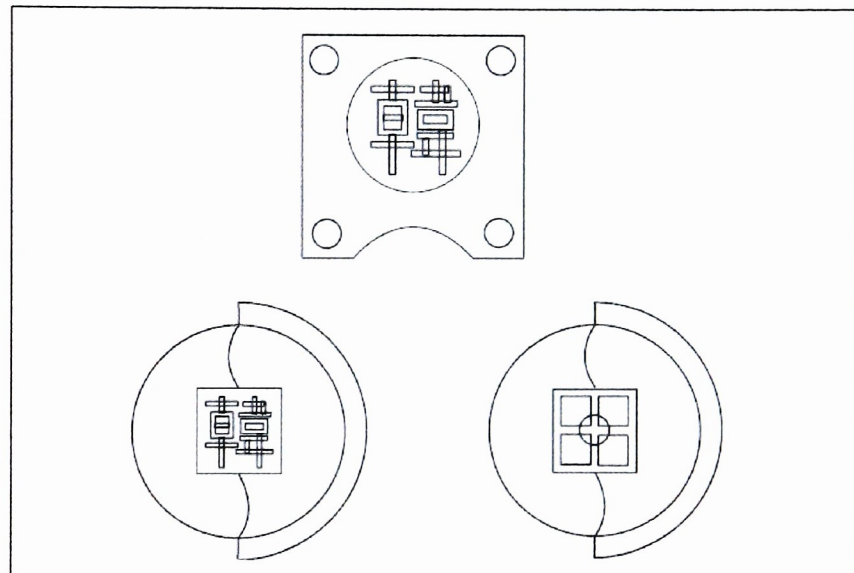


Ideation

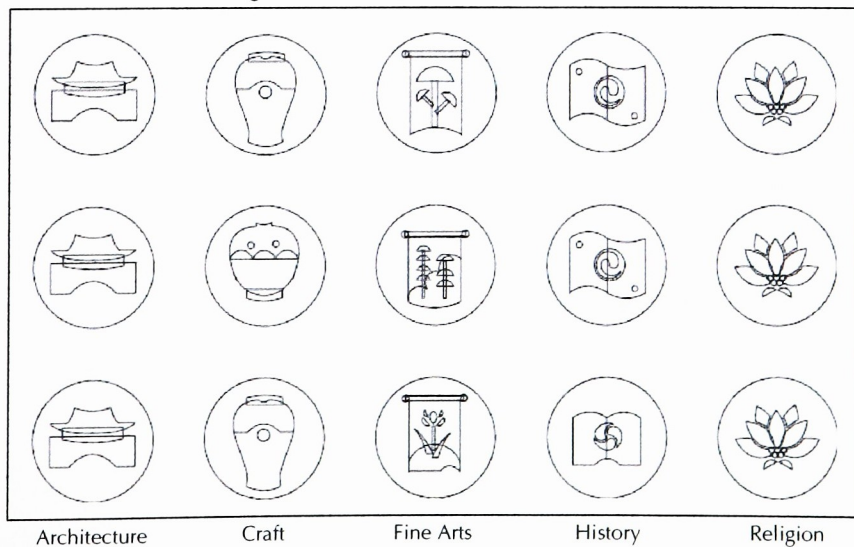
	Architecture	Craft	Fine Arts	History	Religion
3					
4					
5					

The three main symbols and three sets of pictograms which best functioned to communicate with people visually were chosen from sketches on pages 37 to 39. Three sets of pictograms were rearranged to make new sets by considering their visual connections.

Main Symbol

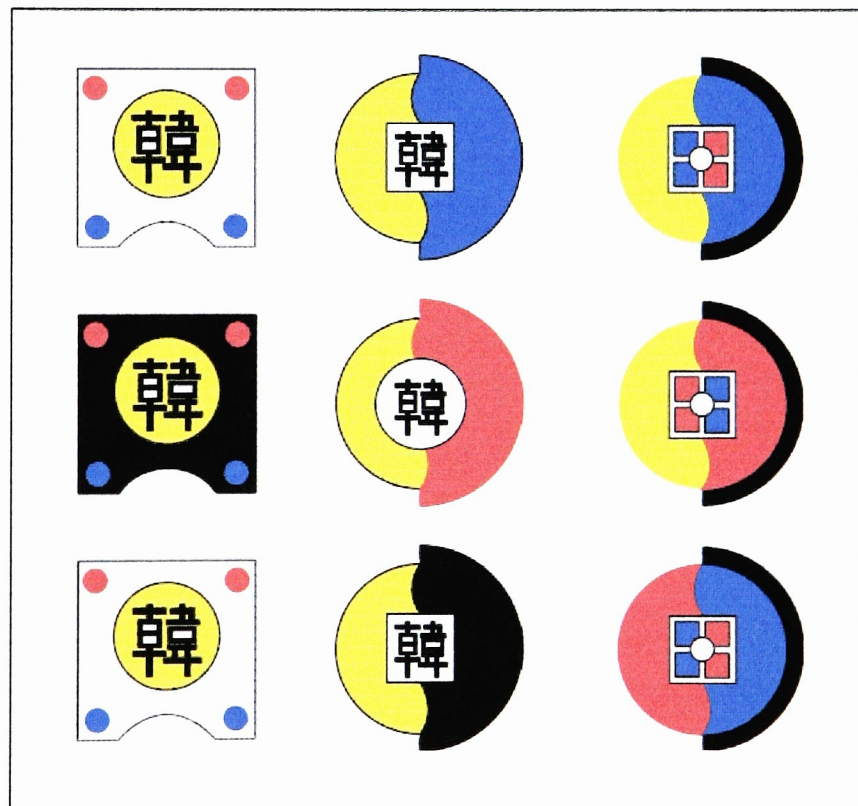


Selected Sets of Pictograms



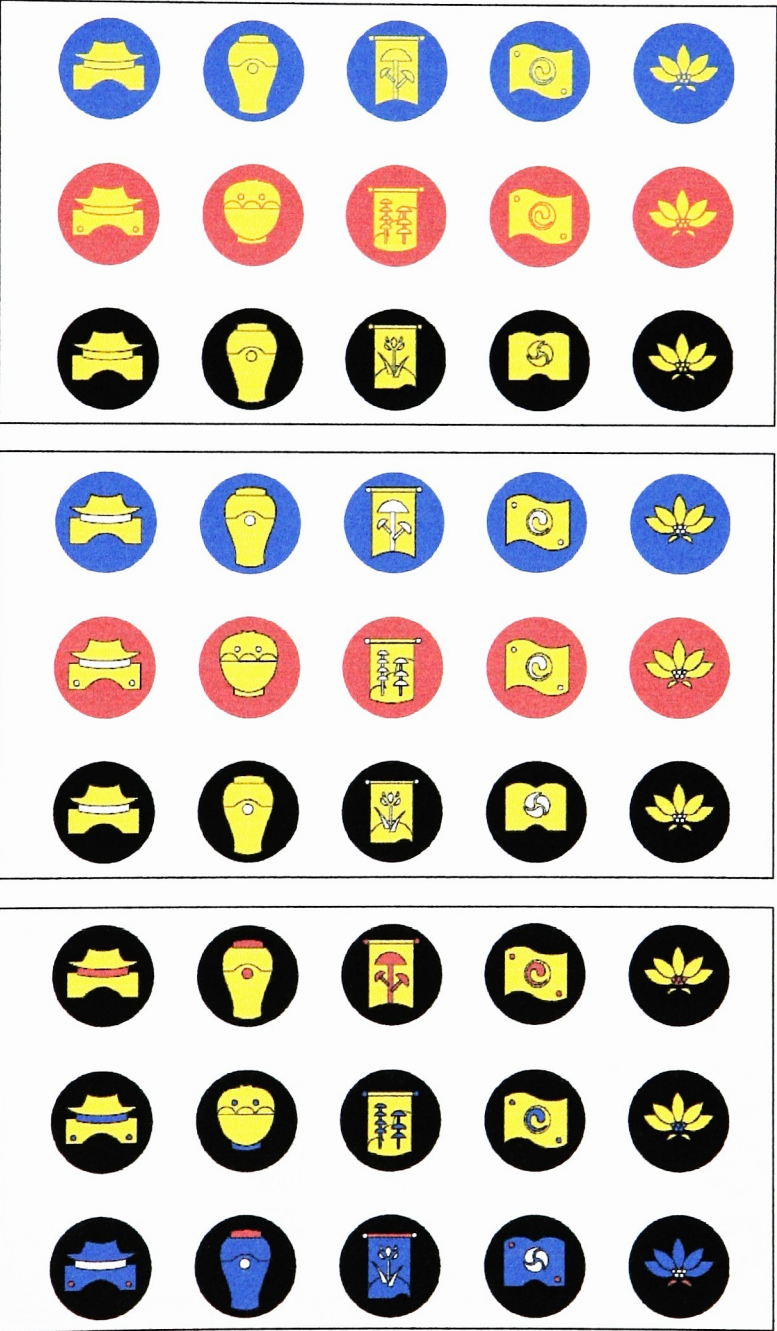
The five colors are applied to these nine possibilities of the main symbol. The first and the third columns contain all five colors, but the middle column shows a limited use of color. Three symbols in the first column imply the door shape, and a yellow circle which is placed in each symbol refers to the concept of center in traditional Korean color use. In the third column, moon and window concept are applied.

Main Symbol

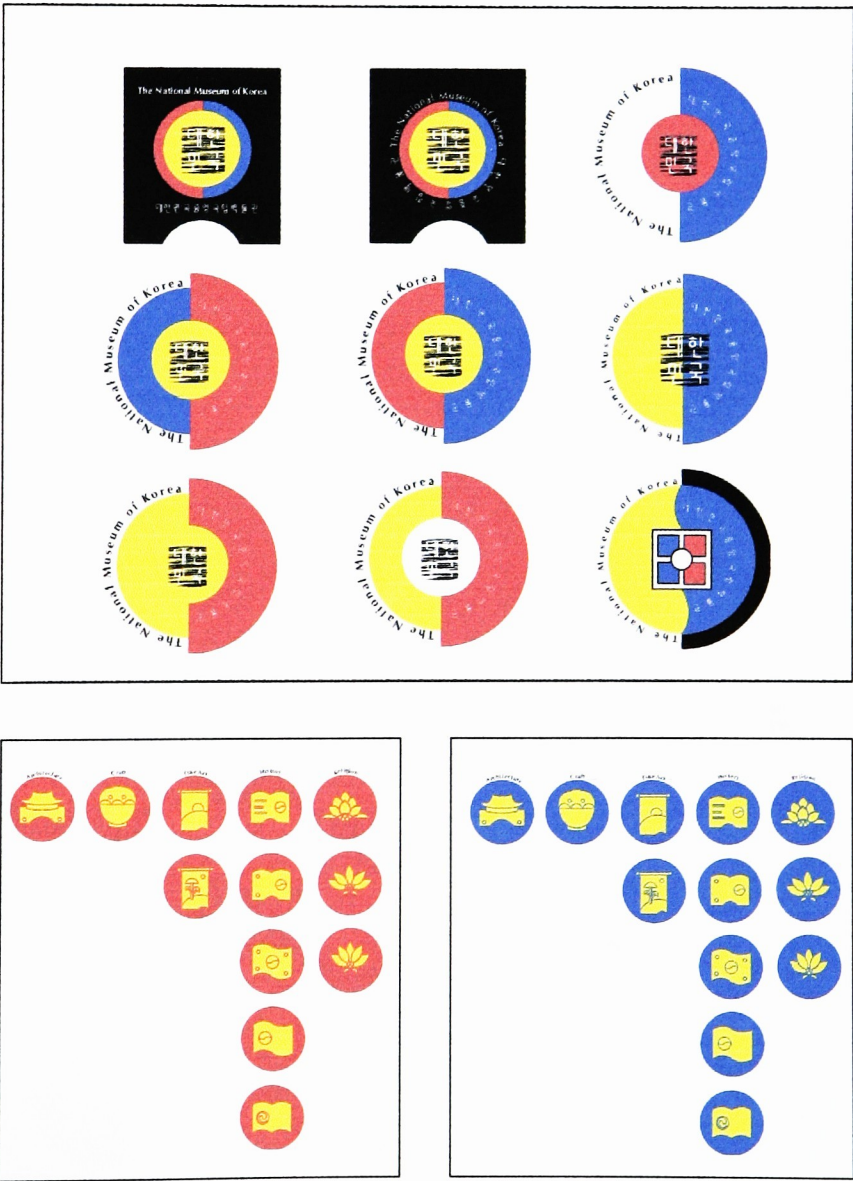


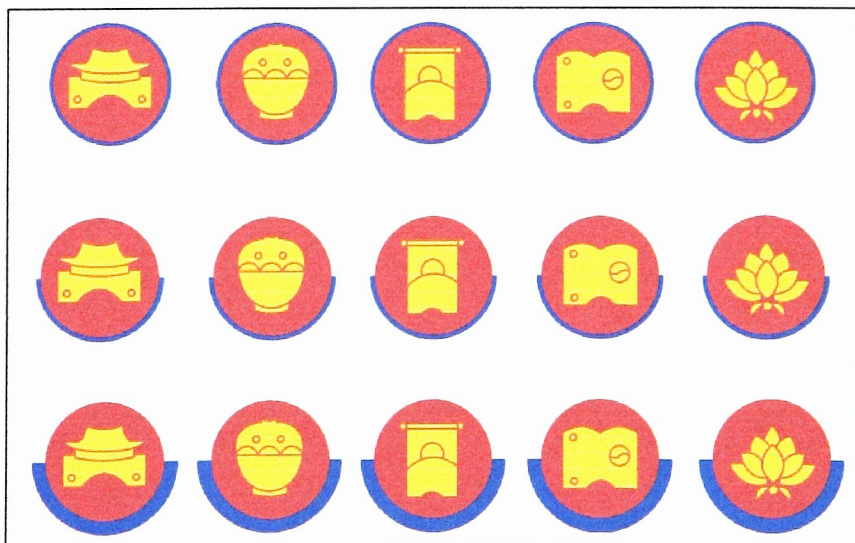
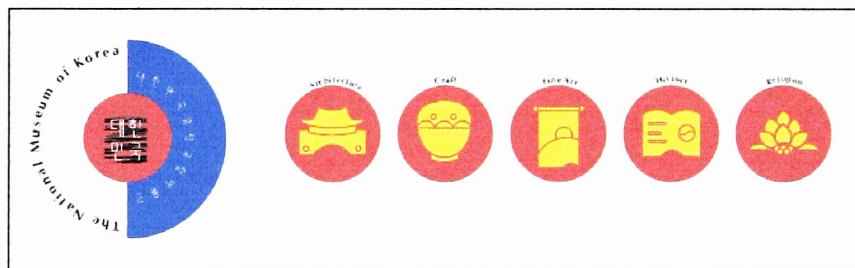
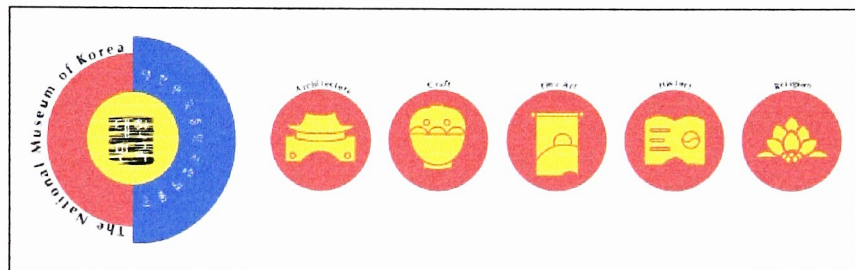
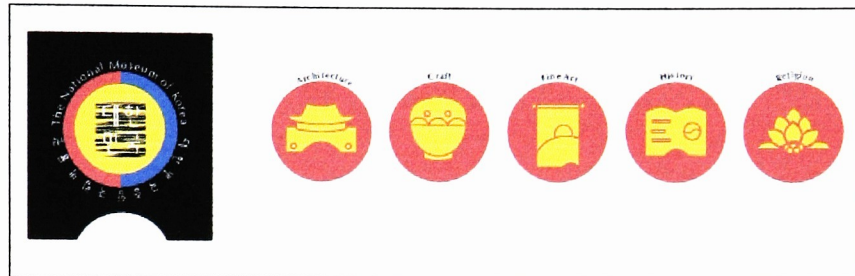
The use of color is limited in these pictogram designs. Small changes are shown in each set of pictograms.

Selected Sets of Pictograms



Type is combined with the improved symbols and pictograms, and the Korean letter / character for “Korea” is used instead of the Chinese letter originally used on page 40. On the next page, the main symbol and five pictograms are displayed as a group of symbols. Three possible pictograms for special exhibitions are also shown.



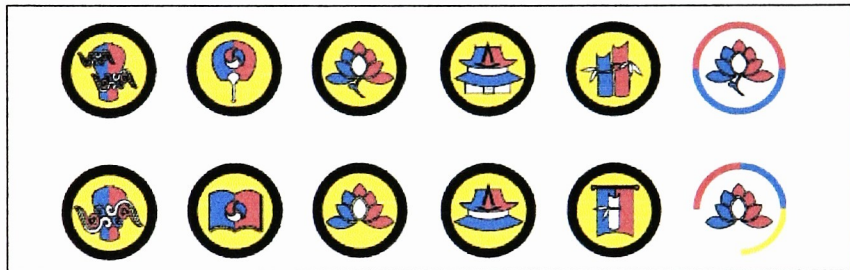


Evaluation

The evaluation was conducted within full or partial thesis committee meetings.

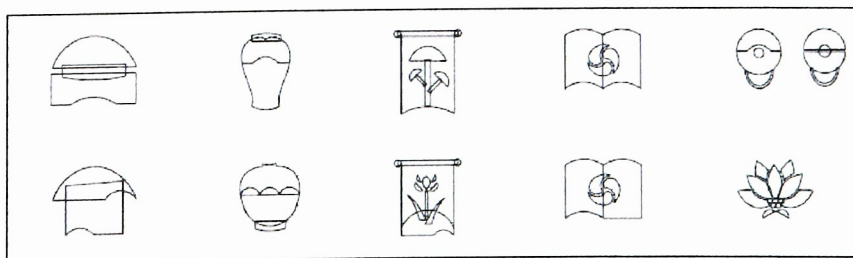
Evaluation for Approach I

A design solution based on Approach I was displayed in the thesis exhibition. The sketches show a combined use of lines, shapes, and colors; thus it is hard to see the isolated use of any one element. The symbol and the pictograms which were devised from this approach did not create a strong connection among the components. Therefore, a different approach, one able to show systematic thinking, was needed to solve this design problem.



Evaluation for Approach II

After experimenting with Approach I, this new approach was applied to the design as a more appropriate solution for designing the symbol and pictograms. This approach helped make a visual connection among the elements. A total of eleven ideation sketches for the main symbol and five sets of ideation sketches of each pictogram were made. The sketches, which are shown on pages 36 to 39, were selected from roughly drawn sketches for each subject. They served as criteria in selecting the eleven sketches of the symbol and five sets of the pictograms. The criteria for using the elements and an appropriate concept for the symbol and the pictograms were followed in making the final choice of one set of symbol and pictograms involving various design solutions.



Implementation

The implementation involved producing a corporate identity program for the National Museum of Korea consisting of a main symbol and the pictograms designed.

A Symbol and Five Pictograms for the Museum

A new symbol and five pictograms were designed for the National Museum of Korea after studying Korean cultural characteristics. The dominant use of lines, shapes, and colors in traditional Korean artifacts was identified in examples of architecture, craft work and other artifacts. These lines, shapes, and colors are used as main components of the new symbol and pictograms; straight lines are used as a secondary component of this design. The repetition of design elements provides the viewer with a visual connection; it also creates specific visual qualities such as elegance and design integration.

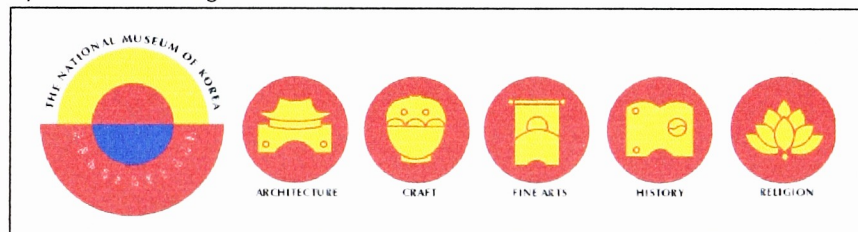
The graphic form and content of each design were chosen to communicate as a visual language. The subject of each design, therefore, effectively represents the theme of the each gallery. All colors are used in the main symbol. The circle placed in the center of the main identity is used as a main component of the pictograms. Thus a strong connection between the the main identity and its divisions is created. The pictograms are designed to be as simple as possible because simplicity strengthens the immediacy and practicality of the approach. Pictograms should function as a visual language on their own, without any verbal explanation. However, in this case, a topic dealing with a cultural background, the visitor who is unaware of Korean cultural history is taken into consideration, and text was added.

The pictograms for the special gallery sections involve different color choices to make a clear distinction between the permanent and special-use pictograms.

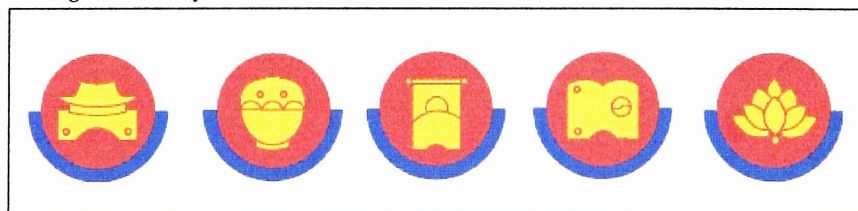
The design elements and concepts of the main symbol and the pictograms are as follows:

a. Main Symbol	Traditional Korean door with yin / yang motif
b. Architecture Gallery	Tile-roofed house
c. Craft Gallery	Vase
d. Fine Arts Gallery	Wall hanging
	Moon
e. History Gallery	Book
	Yin and yang
f. Religion Gallery	Lotus flower

Symbol and Pictograms for Permanent Use



Pictograms for Special Exhibitions



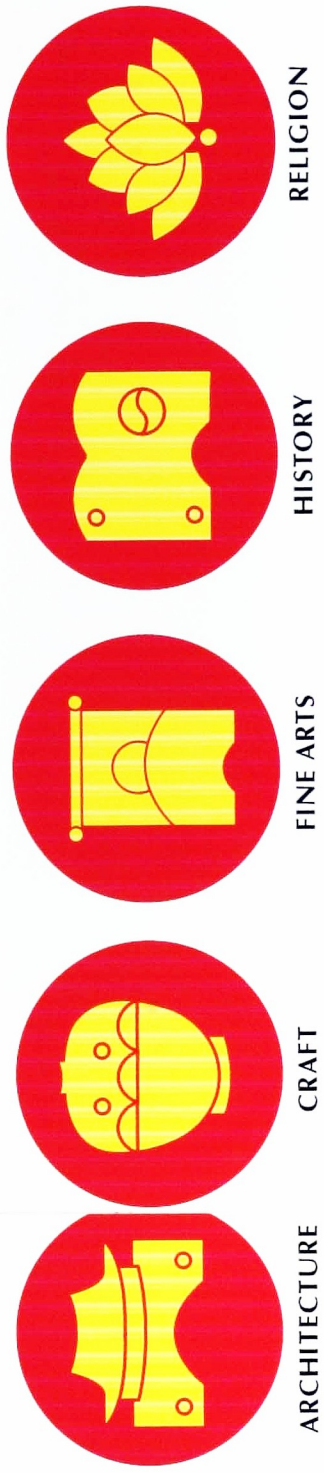
Corporate Identity Program for the Museum

The new symbol and pictograms are applied to actual photographs of the museum including virtual indoor and outdoor applications to show their appropriateness as a visual language. The symbol is applied to signboards outside and inside the museum, banners, and vehicles. At the same time, the pictograms are applied to each gallery section. (See Appendix E)

Main Symbol for the National Museum of Korea



Pictograms for Permanent Exhibitions



Pictograms for Special Exhibitions



Dissemination

A new symbol for the National Museum of Korea and five pictograms for each gallery could assist the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Korea in its mission to effectively improve the quality of life in Korea, to preserve the nation's cultural heritage and promote tourism.

The new symbol and five pictograms were designed to be displayed in the museum. The symbol can be used not only inside the museum lobby, but also outside the museum on the main door, signboards, banners, transportation for visitors, etc. The pictograms will be displayed in each gallery to provide clear, immediate communication between visitor and location. **(See Appendix E)**

This corporate identity program provides an opportunity to refresh the identity design of the museum. As explained on page 31, each gallery section relies on signage including the name of the section. Therefore, when these new sets of symbols are applied to the museum, this design language will communicate effectively and be visually appealing to visitors. A new National Museum of Korea is currently under construction. Thus it was a special challenge to consider design solutions for a new site. Furthermore, if the newly designed sign system were to be distributed to other branches of the National Museum of Korea, it would fulfill the need for unified signage for the entire museum system.

Retrospective Evaluation

Outside Evaluation

Evaluation forms were created asking viewers' opinions on the symbol and the pictogram design on display at the thesis exhibition. This questionnaire had a total of six questions.

A total of twenty questionnaires were handed out to visitors during the thesis exhibition. Thirteen Asians and seven Westerners participated in this evaluation. It was very interesting to hear opinions on the design application from people of entirely different cultural backgrounds. Also, it was a great opportunity to compare their responses to the work. The responses indicated that the research related to the design application generally well; most could see the characteristics of traditional Korean culture. Western visitors, to fortunately, recognized the design as Eastern-based. The use of color appeared prominent, and the use of line was explained well. However, the circular shaped background and frame of the pictograms were not sufficiently integrated with contents. (See Appendix F)

Oral evaluations were also received during the thesis exhibition from a few visitors. They were interested in the design application because the topic dealt with an entirely different culture. From verbal explanations, they were able to get more information about the project and the study.

Committee Feedback

Additional feedback from the chief thesis advisor and two associate advisors suggested directions for improvement. Feedback from Professor Charles Collins, who has a background in Asian culture helped the understanding of Korean culture by giving examples from Chinese culture. The feedback from the chief advisor Professor Deborah Beardslee and an associate advisor Bruce Ian Meader were focused on the design application. Their suggestions and comments helped to set guides for the problem-solving process.

- a. The symbol contains Asian characteristics; the design was recognized as Eastern-based.
- b. The colors red and blue, which express yin and yang, are used appropriately. (See page 47)
- c. Indication of the name of the Museum in both English and Korean is effective.
- d. Pictograms are designed generally well; those for the architecture and craft section were considered especially elegant.
- e. Other pictograms would require additional attention.

After analyzing the above evaluations, a symbol and five pictograms were successfully designed; both research into the elements of line, shape and color and the design applications are connected visually and conceptually. The designs are recognizable as Eastern-based. The symbol and the pictograms proved quite interesting to Western people. The corporate identity program for the museum incorporates the symbol and pictograms generally well. In the future, this design application could be improved based on these evaluations; the central object of the pictograms could be revised to a simpler shape that would result in greater visual impact. Thus, the final goal of communication without verbal expression would be achieved, and even non-Asian visitors to the museum of would be reached.

Conclusion

In the process of developing this thesis project, the following aspects were discovered and internalized:

a. Development of a deeper understanding of traditional Korean cultural characteristics

During the research process, a deeper understanding of traditional Korean cultural characteristics and a foundation for the understanding of design elements were gained. In particular, the dominant use of line, shape, and color, as characteristic of the country's traditional artifacts, was researched by collecting and analyzing the images and text that serve as appropriate examples. Curved lines and round, arched shapes were identified as dominant components of traditional Korean artifacts. These lines and shapes reflect a strong cultural value: respect for nature. The dominant colors (red, yellow, blue, black and white) used in traditional Korean architecture, clothing, crafts and artifacts are also indicative of a closeness to nature because these colors come from plant kingdom and commonly recur in nature.

b. Employment of different design problem-solving approaches to find an appropriate design solution

During the ideation process, different design approaches were explored to select the most appropriate design solution for the project. The importance of problem-solving was internalized in this stage through working with two different design approaches.

The first design approach was not successful because it did not show a sequential process in the design of the symbol and pictograms. Specific rules allowing the symbol and pictograms to function as visual language were not generated, either. Thus, the symbol and pictograms which were designed based on this approach did not yet serve to communicate effectively with the target audience. This approach shows the combined use of lines, shapes, and colors in the symbol and the pictograms. The sketches on pages 33 to 35 show the implementation of this approach. All cultural characteristics are

used: colors, curved lines, straight lines and circles. It was hard to see the isolated use of any one element; therefore, the symbol and the pictograms which were devised from this approach did not create a strong connection among the components. A different approach, one able to show systematic thinking, was needed to solve this design problem.

The second design approach was devised to improve the effectiveness of the symbol and pictograms. This approach was chosen to the design as a more appropriate solution for designing the symbol and pictograms because it applied systematic thinking to create a strong visual connection for communication. This approach shows the use of lines, shapes, and colors step by step. First, lines and shapes were used in the design; then colors were applied to the lines and shapes to complete the symbol and the pictograms. The components of each design are easily seen because this approach shows individual components in a sequence. This sequential approach helped to resulted a visual connection among the elements. Thus it proved to be a more appropriate solution to the design problem. Feedback from visitors in the thesis exhibition was also helpful in improving the design application.

c. Analysis of the importance of systematic thinking

The importance of systematic thinking and its application to design was the most significant area of learning in this thesis project. Systematic thinking enables one to organize and give discipline to design work; it also helps to develop important structures to regulate harmony, unity and integration and result in clear and functional design work. In the first approach, systematic thinking was not considered; the symbol and pictograms were designed with a focus on using the lines, shapes and colors which were explored in the research stage. Thus, the symbol and pictograms lacked a strong connection among the design elements. However, systematic thinking was considered as the most significant point in the second approach. This approach provided certain rules for the design; for example, repetition of the elements such as the same scale of circles and the same thickness of lines. At the same time, variations were limited so as to provide a strong visual connection. Through

this problem-solving exercise based on systematic thinking, setting rules made for a successful design work that communicates the desired message to the gallery visitors. In addition, in the synthesis stage, the organizational method of distilling the larger number of variables down to a smaller, more workable set was explored and proved to be a helpful process in focusing on this thesis project.

d. Increased understanding of visual language

A deeper understanding of visual language, its functions and the conditions which govern it were gained; visual language is a powerful medium to deliver a message to an audience because it has the ability to express or explain a meaning without any verbal explanation. Visual language is significant in the way human beings communicate; in fact, visual language can have a stronger, more immediate impact on viewers than verbal or written language.

It is hoped that the symbol and pictograms will serve the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Korea and will be distributed to the National Museum of Korea and its branches. By accepting this opportunity to refresh and unify their signage, the museum system will enjoy better communication with its visitors by providing both foreigners and citizens with clear, effective visual language.

Glossary of Terms

balance	Placement of colors, light and dark masses, or large or small objects in a picture or layout to create harmony and equilibrium
chroma	A term used in the Munsell system of color specification to indicate the extend to which the color is diluted by white light. The intensity or strength of color, its saturation, or degree of departure from black and white.
CMYK	CMYK is a scheme for combining primary pigments. The C stands for cyan (aqua), M stands for magenta (pink), Y is yellow, and K stands for black.
color	A visual sensation produced in the brain when the eye views various wavelengths of light. Color viewing is a highly subjective experience that varies from individual to individual.
font	A complete collection of characters in one typeface and size, including all letters, figures, symbols and function marks
gravity	Heaviness or lightness of a form showing the effects of instability and movement or of stability and balance
hue	A visual property determined by the dominant light wavelengths reflected or transmitted
line	A path traced by a moving point or a series of points, with a beginning and an end, or two end points. A conceptual line has length but no breadth. Line as form has both length and breadth. Line also forms the border of a plane.
logo	A ligature, special symbol, trademark, trade name, or any other combination of characters, words, or phrases produced as a single graphic and allocated a given width in a typesetting system
pictogram	Pictorial sign that depicts a simplified representation of a particular object or activity

plane	The surface covering the space that is enclosed within the outline of a space. Plane also defines the external limits of a volume.
shape	The characteristics of a line or a plane, or the appearance of a form from a particular angle and distance, but not color, texture, etc.
space	Voids surrounding and between forms.
symbol	Letter or sign designed to represent an activity, idea or object.
texture	Tiny marks or shapes in a rather even distribution covering the surface of a shape.
typeface	A distinctive type design, usually produces in a range of sizes and variations, including bold and italic.
visual elements	Visible characteristics contributing to the appearance of a form.
volume	Three-dimensional space enclosed by planes.

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Color Theory <http://www.bway.net/~jscruggs/Color2.html>

Korean Colors <http://mypage.channeli.net/digimill/pre.htm>

The National Museum of Korea <http://www.museum.go.kr/index.shtml>

Appendices

Cultural
Characteristics
and
Graphic Design

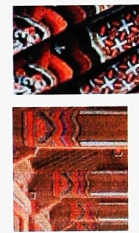
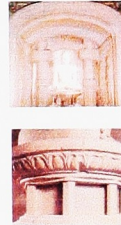
Use of Design Elements

Line

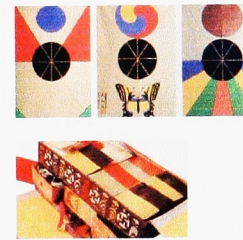
Shape

Color

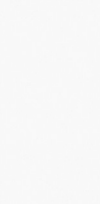
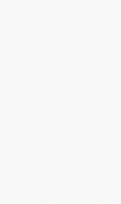
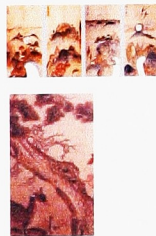
Architecture



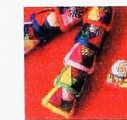
Crafts



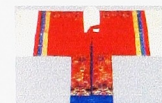
Fine Arts



Tools



Fashion



Cultural
Characteristics
and
Graphic Design

Visual Characteristic of Examples

Ornament

Simple

Religious influence

Architecture



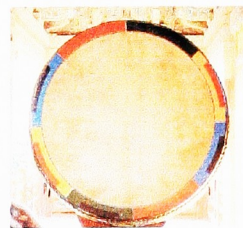
Crafts



Fine Arts


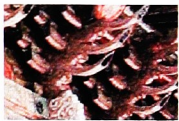









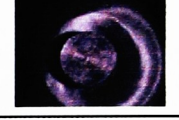





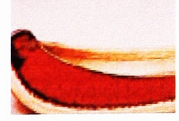




Tools




Fashion









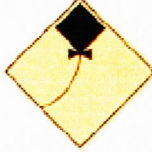





Cultural Characteristics and Graphic Design		Potential Meaning and Feeling of Elements			
		Natural	Artificial	Simple	Complex
Line	Curved Line				
	Straight Line				
Shape	Arched				
	Round				
Color	Black				
	White				
	Blue				
	Red				
	Yellow				

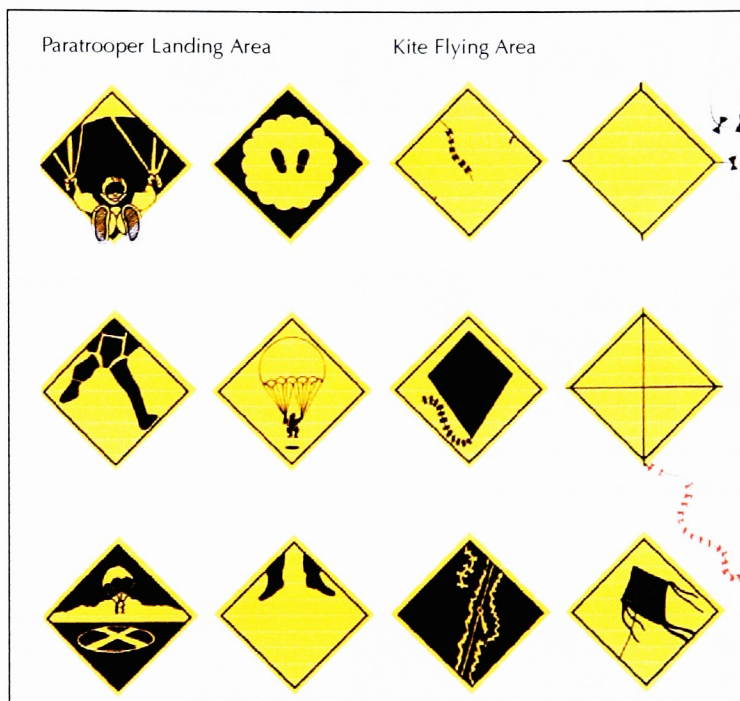
Visual Examples of Road Sign Exercise

Road Sign Solutions Series



 Indian Village	 Ant Farm	 Baseball Field
 Checkers Area	 Fortune Teller	 Target Range
 Red Light District	 Botanical Gardens	 Kite Flying Area
 Nuclear Power Plant	 Earthquake/Fault Line	 Paratrooper Landing

Road Sign Solutions Examples



Meaning of Traditional Korean Colors with Examples

Red
South
Summer
Fire



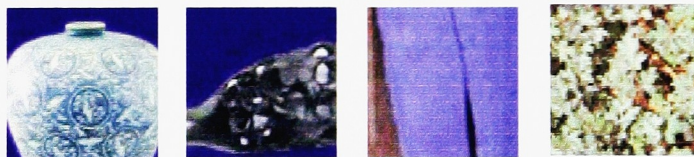
comfortable, cold, deep, sensitivity, peace, loyalty, freshness,
youth, hope, clean, sincerity, desire to nurture, sea, sky

Yellow
Center
No season
Earth



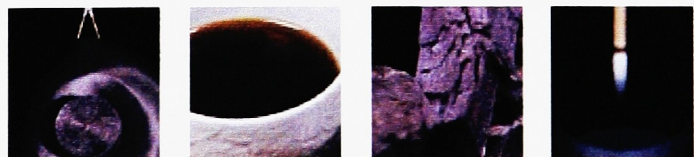
positive virtues of faith, constancy, wisdom, glory, fullness,
light, creativity, warmth, softness, tenderness, jealousy,
treachery, cowardice

Blue
East
Spring
Wood



active, healthy, strength, power, vitality, fervor, fire,
progressive, extroversion

Black
North
Winter
Water



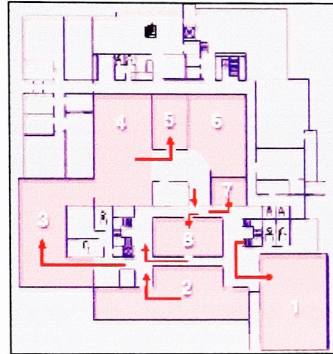
dark, heavy, modern, fear, death, dignity, power, vanity,
hopelessness, silence, anxiety, night, mystery, eternity

White
West
Fall
Metal



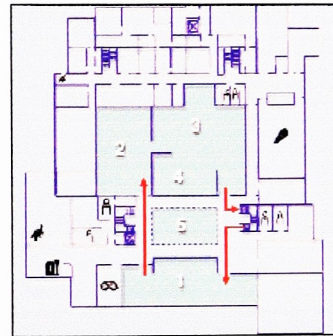
clean, natural, innocent, simplicity, purity, honesty, nobleness
independent, light, hope, fresh,

Floor Plan for the National Museum of Korea



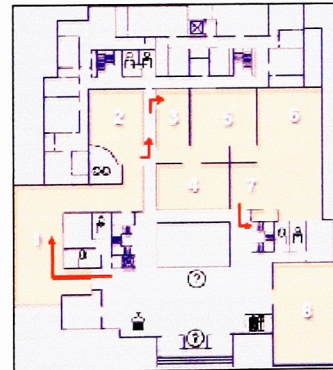
Floor 1

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Buddhist Sculpture | 1 |
| 2. Metal Arts | 2 |
| 3. Painting | 3 |
| 4. Historical Materials | 4 |
| 5. Su-jong Collection | 5 |
| 6. Dong-won Collection | 6 |
| 7. Iuchi Collection | 7 |
| 8. Special Exhibition | 8 |



Floor 2

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| 1. Koryo Celadon | 9 |
| 2. Cho son Pun'chong Ware | 10 |
| 3. Cho son Porcelain | 11 |
| 4. Sarangbang (Scholar's Studio) | 12 |
| 5. Kyongbokkung Model | 13 |



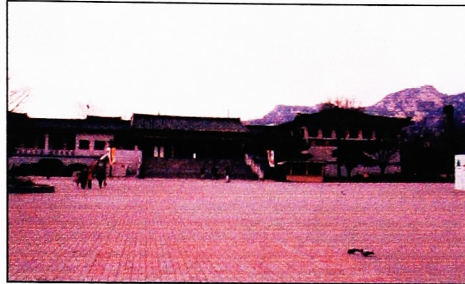
Floor 3

- | | |
|-------------------------|----|
| 1. Prehistory | 14 |
| 2. Proto Three Kingdoms | 15 |
| 3. Koguryo | 16 |
| 4. Paekche | 17 |
| 5. Kaya | 18 |
| 6. Shilla | 19 |
| 7. Unified Shilla | 20 |
| 8. Special Exhibition | 21 |

Categorizes 21 collections section to 5 permanent and special galleries

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. Architecture | #12, 13 |
| 2. Craft | #5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 20 |
| 3. Fine Art | #3 |
| 4. History | #4 |
| 5. Religious Artifacts | #1,2 |
| 6. Special Exhibitions | #8, 21 |

Images of the National Museum of Korea

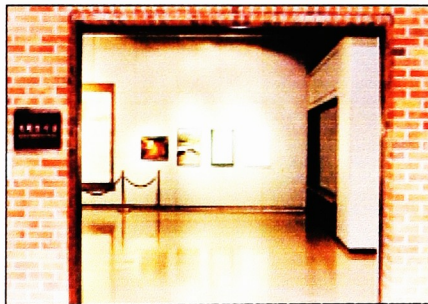


Outside view of The National Museum of Korea

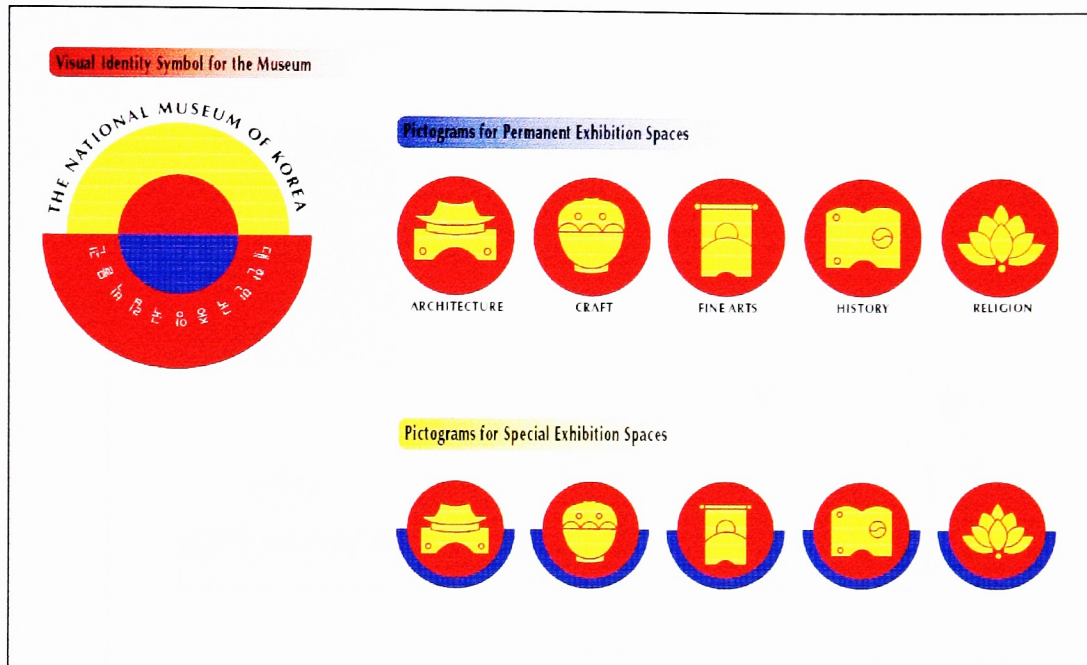


A main signboard of the museum

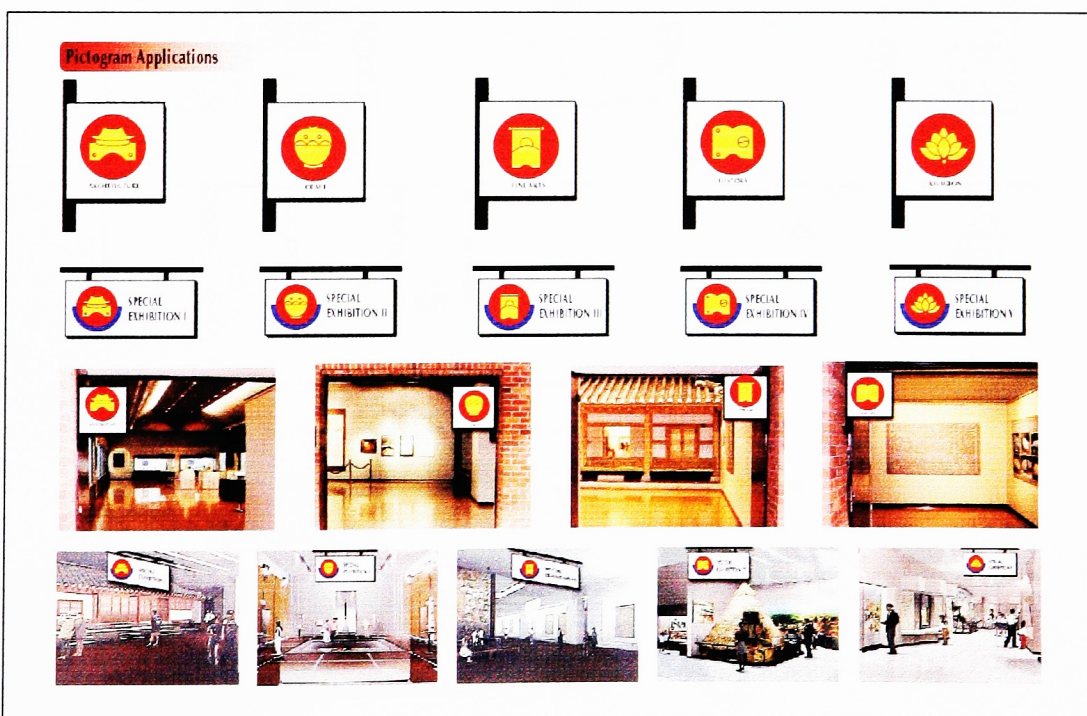
Interior of museum



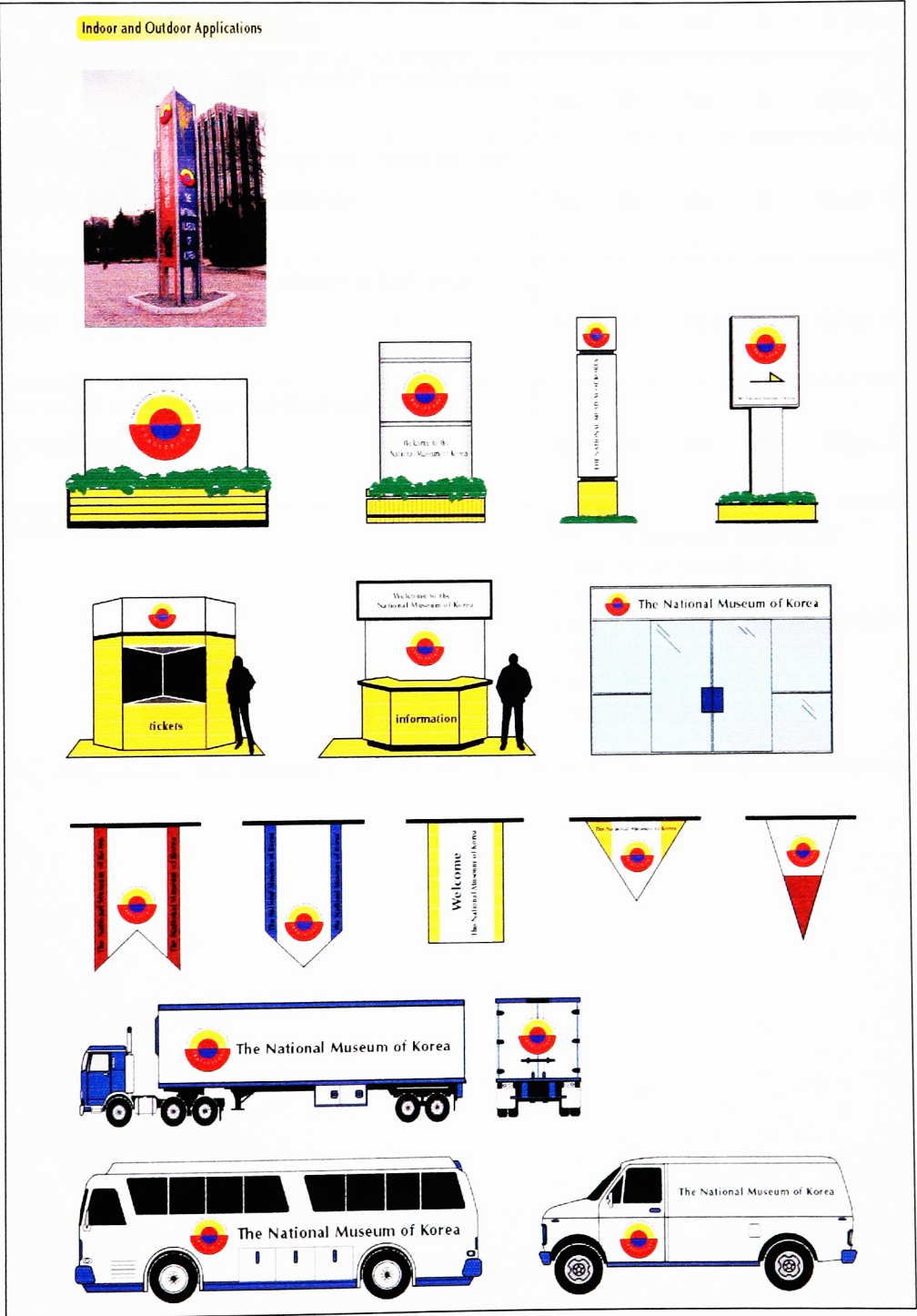
Final System



Pictogram Applications



Symbol Applications



Questionnaire Responses

Q1. Do you understand clearly this thesis study?	Yes	18	No	0	Other	2
Q2. Do you see a clear connection between research and application?	Yes	17	No	0	Other	3
Q3. Do you understand how traditional Korean lines, shapes, and colors are applied to the symbol and pictogram design?	Yes	16	No	0	Other	4
Q4. Is it meaningful to select the National Museum of Korea as an application?	Yes	20	No	0	Other	0
Q5. Do these symbol and pictograms work functionally as a visual language in the museum?	Yes	16	No	0	Other	4
Q6. Additional comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • main symbol needs more curved lines; straight lines dominate • use of color is good • shapes communicate less than the two other elements • symbol looks very strong; communicates well visually 					